

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 8052

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SP

SUBJECT: FRANCO LINGERS

REF: MADRID 7687

1. FRANCO'S LINGERING PAST HOPE HAS BECOME A POLITICAL AS WELL AS MEDICAL PHENOMENON, IMPEDING THE PRINCE FROM CHARTING A NEW POLITICAL DIRECTION.

2. FRANCO'S SURVIVAL BORDERS ON SCIENCE FICTION. THE SIGNED MEDICAL BULLETINS, INCESSANTLY REPORTED IN THE WORLD PRESS, ARE BACKED BY THE REPUTATIONS OF A MEDICAL TEAM NUMBERING ABOUT 35 AND ENCOMPASSING MOST OF THE SPECIALTIES KNOWN TO MEDICINE. (BEGIN NOFORN: WE ALSO HAVE ON A VERY CONFIDENTIAL BASIS A REGULAR CROSS-CHECK FROM ONE OF FRANCO'S DOCTORS TO OUR AIR ATTACHE. END NOFORN). IN BRIEF, FRANCO IS IN ALMOST SUSPENDED ANIMATION, SEDATED AND BODY TEMPERATURE LOWERED BY REFRIGERATION TECHNIQUES, WITH BRAIN WAVES BEING THE SALIENT INDICATOR OF LIFE. HE USES AN ARTIFICIAL KIDNEY, RESPIRATORY EQUIPMENT, A PUMP TO HELP CIRCULATE HIS BLOOD, AND FREQUENT TRANSFUSIONS. HIS HEART WORKS BUT WITH AN

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ELECTRICAL ASSIST, AND THE PROGNOSIS REMAINS "VERY GRAVE."

3. THE MORAL ISSUE IS FAMILIAR AND WIDELY DISCUSSED, WITH NOT A FEW SPANIARDS NOW BELIEVING THAT ON GROUNDS OF COMPASSION ALONE HE SHOULD BE LEFT TO DIE IN PEACE. BUT DOCTORS TRY TO KEEP THEIR PATIENTS ALIVE, AND NO ONE WOULD WISH TO BE THOUGHT PARTY TO A DOCTORS' PLOT. THE LAW OF LARGE ORGANIZATIONS PERMITS EACH SPECIALIST TO DO HIS THING (E.G., THE CONTROVERSIAL STOMACH OPERATIONS). ON A MORE POLITICAL LEVEL, FRANCO'S DOCTOR SON-IN-LAW, THE MARQUES DE VILLAVARDE, HAS BEEN HIGHLY VISIBLE. THERE IS CONSIDERABLE BUT UNVERIFIED SPECULATION THAT HE IS SERVING THE INTERESTS OF THE "BUNKER" WHO ARE WORKING VERY HARD TO CIRCUMSCRIBE JUAN CARLOS' OPTIONS.

4. NONE OF THIS ALTERS THE ANALYSIS IN REFTEL BUT IT HIGHLIGHTS THE PROBLEM OF CHARTING A NEW DIRECTION SO LONG AS JUAN CARLOS IS ONLY THE FUTURE KING.

-- THE PRINCE COULD AND DID ACT WITH DISPATCH AND FLAIR ON THE SAHARA, GAINING HIM PUBLIC PRESTIGE AND USEFUL CLOUT WITH THE SPANISH MILITARY, ALTHOUGH THE END RESULT IN WHICH MOROCCO APPARENTLY HAS HAD ITS WAY COULD DIMINISH THE LUSTRE.

-- THE PRINCE HAS PRESIDED OVER SOME USEFUL OPENINGS TOWARD THE REGIONAL ISSUES: (A) THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMISSION TO WORK OUT A SEPARATE ADMINISTRATIVE STATUTE FOR THE BASQUE PROVINCES, (B) PASSAGE OF A LAW GIVING WIDER SCOPE FOR THE STUDY AND USE OF REGIONAL LANGUAGES, SUCH AS BASQUE AND CATALAN, AND (C) SPECIAL DEVELOPMENTAL MEASURES FOR THE CANARIES. BROAD SUPPORT PROVIDED THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROJECT THE IMAGE OF CHANGE HERE.

-- BUT JUAN CARLOS CANNOT EASILY SET THE THRUST AND DIRECTION OF APERTURA, NOR APPOINT THE NEW GOVERNMENT -- WITH OR WITHOUT ARIAS -- WITHOUT FIRST BECOMING KING.

-- IN THE MEANTIME EXTREME RIGHTIST THUGS -- PERHAPS SHIELDED BY SOME POLICE -- HAVE BEEN ACTIVE.

-- THE VETERANS' GROUPS AND OTHER RIGHTIST "BUNKER" ELEMENTS
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HAVE BEEN GETTING ORGANIZED, AND PREACHING AGAINST DEMOCRACY AND THE TWENTIETH CENTURY IN GENERAL. THE COMMUNISTS (THE PCE OF SANTIAGO CARRILLO) ALMOST CERTAINLY WILL NOT BE LEGALIZED, AND THE FOCUS OF THE "BUNKER" SEEMS TO BE SHIFTING TOWARDS TRYING TO EXCLUDE THE SOCIALISTS OF FELIPE GONZALEZ FROM THE POLITICAL GAME, AN ACT THAT WOULD LIKELY PREVENT MOST OF THE DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION FROM JOINING THE NEW POLITICS AND ENSURE A CHILLY RECEPTION FROM THE WESTERN EUROPEANS.

-- THE CORTES PRESIDENCY, A KEY POST, COMES UP FOR APPOINTMENT BETWEEN NOVEMBER 26 AND DECEMBER 6. REGIME SUPPORTERS OF THE QUITE CONSERVATIVE INCUMBENT, RODRIGUEZ DE VALCARCEL, HAVE MOUNTED A WELL-ORCHESTRATED CAMPAIGN TO RETAIN HIM. FOR OBVIOUS REASONS, JUAN CARLOS INCLINES TOWARDS HIS REPLACEMENT, BUT IF FRANCO LINGERS, IT WILL BE HARDER TO BREAK WITH THE PAST.

5. IN SUM, WE GET THE IMPRESSION THAT THE TIME HAS PASSED DURING WHICH FRANCO'S LINGERING COULD BE LOOKED UPON AS A GRACE PERIOD IN WHICH TO HANDLE THE SAHARA AND MULL OVER THE ROADS TO APERATURA. FROM NOW ON, IT IS LIKELY TO CONTRIBUTE TO POLARIZATION, WITH THE RIGHT WORKING AGAINST CHANGE, AND THE COMMUNISTS AND OTHER EXTREMISTS OF THE LEFT POINTING TO RIGHTIST ACTIVITY AS EVIDENCE OF JUAN CARLOS' INABILITY TO PULL OFF APERATURA. NONE OF THIS HAS REACHED A CRITICAL STAGE BY ANY MEANS, AND FRANCO MAY DIE SHORTLY, BUT IT HAS BECOME MORE AND MORE A MATTER OF CONCERN. IF FRANCO HOLDS ON, THE CORTES PRESIDENCY WILL PROVIDE A CRUCIAL TEST. MOREOVER, THE QUESTION OF WHETHER TO DECLARE HIM INCAPACITATED MAY BE RAISED AGAIN.
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